



Town of Groton, Connecticut

Meeting Minutes

Town Council Committee of the Whole

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Groton, CT 06340-4394
Town Clerk 860-441-6640
Town Manager
860-441-6630

Mayor Heather Bond Somers, Councilors Dean G. Antipas, Bruce S. Flax, Bill Johnson, Karen F. Morton, Deborah L. Peruzzotti, Rita M. Schmidt, James L. Streeter, and Harry A. Watson

Tuesday, March 26, 2013

6:00 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

REGULAR MEETING

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Somers called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Members Present: Mayor Somers, Councilor Antipas, Councilor Flax, Councilor Johnson, Councilor Morton, Councilor Peruzzotti, Councilor Schmidt and Councilor Streeter
Members Absent: Councilor Watson

3. Calendar and Communications

None.

4. Approval of Minutes

2013-0057 Approval of Minutes (Committee of the Whole)

RESOLUTION ACCEPTING COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MINUTES

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the Town Council Committee of the Whole meetings of January 7, 2013, February 12, 2013, February 21, 2013, February 26, 2013, and March 12, 2013 are hereby accepted and approved.

A motion was made by Councilor Streeter, seconded by Councilor Schmidt, to adopt.

The motion carried unanimously

5. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None.

6. NEW BUSINESS

2013-0005 Joint Meeting with Board of Education (2013 Standing Referral)

Discussed

Superintendent John Ramos, Carolyn Dickey, Sean McKenna, Kirsten Hoyt, and Beth Gianacoplos were present representing the Board of Education and Groton Public Schools.

Mayor Somers invited the Board of Education to the meeting to provide an update on the Superintendent search and to discuss the magnet school transportation issue.

Ms. Hoyt addressed magnet school transportation first. Additional information has come to light since the Board of Education decided to eliminate out of district magnet school transportation. It is now known that the transportation is fully reimbursed by the state. Ms. Hoyt feels that the costs can be absorbed by Groton Public Schools, but the issue must be taken back to the Board for a vote.

Town Manager Oefinger explained that out of district magnet school transportation is reimbursed by the state and who receives the money is irrelevant. The Board of Education has additional costs this year including the transportation associated with redistricting. However, there was a

concern with increasing the budget from last year. To keep the number down, the out of district magnet school transportation was one item that was cut by the Board. Ms. Hoyt noted that there is no requirement to provide transportation for out of district magnet school students.

Mayor Somers asked what guarantee there is that the transportation will be reinstated if the Board of Education budget is increased to cover the magnet school transportation. Ms. Hoyt stated she cannot speak for the whole Board and she can discuss the issue with them on April 8th and. She should have a consensus/vote by the budget meeting with the Town Council on April 11th.

In response to questions from Councilor Antipas, Ms. Dickey noted the breakdown of the transportation grants. Dr. Ramos explained that this year the district is faced with a fiscal cliff as well as additional mandates that increased the overall budget by 5.5%. The Board identified potential cuts to bring the budget within reason. With respect to out of district magnet school transportation, the Board largely struggled with the philosophical issue of cutting expenses within the district versus paying to transport students out of the district. Councilor Morton asked the cost to educate these children in the Groton school system and potential impact on racial balance. Dr. Ramos stated he did not have the specific numbers, but they would go up significantly.

Christine Cabral, the parent who researched this item, and Ms. Dickey discussed the breakdown of the transportation grant reimbursements. A smaller revenue number is projected by the Town for budget purposes, but a bigger number is realized once the grant dollars come in. The grants offset the local revenue amounts needed to make up the Minimum Budget Requirement (MBR).

Ms. Hoyt addressed the Superintendent search. The Board met last night and decided to issue a broader RFP for Superintendent search firms. They also discussed what constituencies should be on the search committee and what process to follow.

Ms. Hoyt stated she will be unable to attend the budget review meeting on April 11th. The Board has presented a budget with a 1.4% increase. She noted that the Board conducted significant deliberations to bring the increase in the budget down from 5.5% to 1.4%.

Finally, Ms. Hoyt noted that the Board of Education does an 'Adopt-a-School' program where Board members attend school events and functions, and she offered a similar program to any interested Town Councilors.

2013-0075**Property Acquisition/Sale (2013 Standing Referral)**

A motion was made by Councilor Johnson, seconded by Councilor Peruzzotti, to enter executive session at 6:37 p.m. to discuss 2013-0075 Property Acquisition/Sale and to invite Town Manager Mark Oefinger to attend.

The motion carried unanimously

Discussed

The executive session concluded at 7:28 p.m.

2013-0088**Poquonnock River Walkway Park - Remediation Work**

Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger noted this issue involves the Poquonnock River Walkway Parklet just north of the entrance to Bluff Point. The former Electric Boat Midway Facility property was contaminated by solvents used in the manufacturing process. The situation has been monitored by Electric Boat over the years, and they would now like to undertake remediation. Electric Boat must access the Town's property because the drainage system serving the Midway Facility outlets through the parklet property. This property was obtained by the Town from Electric Boat and through a foreclosure. Electric Boat is requesting permission to access the property and the Town Manager must be authorized to sign associated land use applications. There is no cost to the Town. Portions of the park will not be available for some period of time. The Town Manager noted

that Electric Boat representatives are available to make a presentation to the Town Council if desired.

A motion was made by Councilor Johnson, seconded by Councilor Schmidt, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

Mark Berry, Director of Parks and Recreation, stated he has met with the engineers and Electric Boat has obtained DEEP approval. Any damage to the park will be taken care of. Work is scheduled for the fall so that the park will remain open during the summer

The motion carried unanimously

2012-0220 Review of Ordinance No. 135 - Consumption of Alcohol at Town Sponsored Events

Not Discussed

The Town Manager asked the Council to table discussion of this item because Police Chief Mike Crowley was unable to attend the meeting.

2012-0228 Noank Fire District Response on Noank School Reuse

Recommended for a Resolution

Mayor Somers explained that the Committee of Whole met with representatives from Noank and discussed entering into a Memorandum of Agreement (MOU) regarding the former Noank School. The Council met in executive session and discussed criteria for the MOU. As a result of a subsequent discussion with Noank representatives, it became evident that the fire district would not be able to comply with the desired criteria. The Council also does not feel there was a viable financial plan presented. Therefore, the Council has decided that the Town will not pursue an MOU with Noank and will retain the property.

Councilor Flax does not feel the proposal is in the spirit of what the original Noank School Reuse Task Force was trying to achieve for the property. He suggested that if a similar plan had been proposed during the Task Force process, it would have been shot down." Mayor Somers added that the Town Council felt there would be an undue burden on fire district taxpayers to maintain the building. She noted receipt of a number of telephone calls and a petition with 120 signatures asking the Council not to move forward with the MOU. Mayor Somers reiterated the Council's concerns of no long term plan for the building and the undue burden on the fire district, coupled with the fact that it is not in the best interest of the Town to turn the building over at this time.

A motion was made by Councilor Flax, seconded by Councilor Peruzzotti, to not proceed with an MOU with the Noank Fire District and to re-refer the former Noank School to the Council for final disposition.

Antipas noted that he would have liked to have seen more fire district support for the proposal.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Votes: In Favor: 7 - Mayor Somers, Councilor Flax, Councilor Johnson, Councilor Morton, Councilor Peruzzotti, Councilor Schmidt and Councilor Streeter
Opposed: 1 - Councilor Antipas

2013-0079 Annual RTM Budget Meeting

Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger noted the referral memo from Town Clerk Betsy Moukawsher proposing the Annual RTM Budget Meeting be held on Monday, April 29th at 7:00 p.m. at the Senior Center.

A motion was made by Councilor Peruzzotti, seconded by Councilor Streeter, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously

2013-0087 Groton Rotary Grant - Groton Sailing Program

A motion was made by Councilor Streeter, seconded by Councilor Antipas, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously

2013-0048

FYE 2014 Budget

Discussed

The budget public hearing will be held on March 28th at 7:00 p.m. at the Senior Center. The Town Manager noted the budget review schedule. In addition, the RTM passed a resolution requesting the Town Manager to create a list of potential cuts to bring about a zero mill rate increase, which equates to approximately \$4 million in cuts. The proposed budget represents a 0.6% increase, but a 5.5% increase in the mill rate. The Town Manager reviewed the factors driving the mill rate increase. He will develop a list of potential cuts for the RTM and review it with the Town Council. The Town Manager is not recommending any of the reductions, which he briefly reviewed.

The Town Manager directed the Council's attention to a table in the budget message showing how money is spent. In 2008, operating costs for Town Operations were over \$8 million; they have been cut \$2 million in the last six years. He emphasized that there is no place left to cut except people and programs. The Town Manager also reminded Councilors that 90% of residential property owners saw their taxes stay the same or go down this year.

Mayor Somers invited the public to attend or watch on television the budget review sessions. The FYE 2014 Proposed Budget is available in the libraries, on line, and for purchase at a cost of \$45.

2013-0090

Judson Avenue Drainage Project

Discussed

Mayor Somers was approached by a resident during her office hours at the Library. This project is proposed in the FYE 2014 CIP Budget for a November 2013 referendum at a cost of \$1.6 million. If the Council wants to bring this project to referendum, the bond ordinance process must start immediately after the budget process. The Town Manager stated this project will not fix all of the drainage problems in the Judson Avenue area because of high ground water. Mayor Somers asked if it is the Town's responsibility to fix this problem. Town Manager stated this is a policy issue. The Town is not legally liable, but if there is a desire to fix the problem, it must be done by the Town because of the expense. The Town has spent about \$250,000 on engineering and permitting for this project.

7. Consideration of Committee Referral Items as per Town Council Referral List

None.

8. OTHER BUSINESS

Mayor Somers noted that Mr. Kelly from Groton Little League is trying to raise money for lights for Burrows Field and he is looking for the Town to contribute to the cost of electricity. Mayor Somers made a referral to the Committee of the Whole.

9. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Councilor Flax, seconded by Councilor Schmidt, to adjourn the meeting at 8:26 p.m.

The motion carried unanimously.